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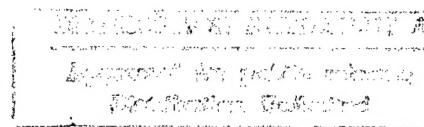
BUNA: MacARTHUR'S LIEUTENANTS IN AN IMMATURE THEATER

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



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Abstract

The Battle for Buna which occurred in late 1942 is a forgotten episode in U.S. military history. Events happening simultaneously on Guadalcanal dominated the headlines and is historically remembered as one of the rallying points of the Pacific war. The Battle for Buna had many parallels to Guadalcanal. Both were emotional struggles within larger campaigns and their outcomes impacted the overall strategic planning for both the Allies and Japan.

Buna like Guadalcanal tested American will and resolve. Buna was like no other battle fought in U.S. history. The terrain, specifically the dense, disease-infected jungle sapped the strength from all three forces involved, the Americans, Australians and Japanese. The conditions were possibly the worst for U.S. forces in the entire war. U.S. military leadership had to find solutions in a theater that was not developed to support military operations.

This paper discusses two of the innovators who understood the principles of war, operational art and the dynamics of combat and turned the battlefield in the Allies favor. The leadership of Army Air Corps General George Kenney and Army General Robert Eichelberger were two pivotal characters that worked for Douglas MacArthur and in essence saved the day at Buna and, from a strategical standpoint, the New Guinea Campaign. They reversed the fortunes of MacArthur and his staff by reinforcing sound principles. The lessons learned at Buna were applied strategically in future campaigns against Japanese forces in the Pacific.

Introduction

The combined United States and Australian effort during the New Guinea/Papuan Campaign in 1942-43 is an overlooked chapter of U.S. military history. North Africa and Sicily offensives in the European Theater and the emotional fighting at Guadalcanal overshadowed the events on New Guinea. The early struggles on the Papuan peninsula provided the catalyst for future military operations and provided the keys to success in defeating the Japanese land and air forces in the Pacific.

This case study reviews the Papuan Campaign; specifically the U.S. Army's actions during the Battle for Buna. Included are powerful personalities, bold and innovative leadership and the challenges of geography. Buna is a study of operational art in an immature theater. It shows how previous wars influenced the thinking of operational commanders and stresses the importance of viewing a battlefield firsthand.

Doctor Vego writes: "Designing a major operation or campaign is not a simple job amenable to a few hours of discussion. It requires time, imagination, hard work and above all sound military thinking and common sense on the part of the operational commander and their staffs. In each instance the operational commander must properly balance competing demands and scarce resources while accomplishing the assigned operational or strategic objective."¹

Setting the Stage

The Allies planned for offensive operations against the Japanese after the Battle of Midway. The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided on operations in the South Pacific. Operations were divided into three tasks:

"Task One was the seizure and occupation of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi and adjacent positions...Task Two was the seizure and occupation of the remainder of the Solomon Islands, of Lae, Salamaua, and the northeast corner of New Guinea ...Task Three was the seizure and

¹ Milan Vego, NWC 4104 "Fundamentals of Operational Design" (Newport, RI: Naval War College, August 1996), 27.

occupation of Rabuul and adjacent positions in the New Guinea-New Ireland area.”

General Douglas MacArthur was given Tasks Two and Three... and lost no time in preparing for the attack on Lae and Salamaua and for this he needed an airfield north of Milne Bay. The logical place was Buna Government Station, which had a small landing strip.²

This discussion focuses on two of MacArthur’s most able-bodied warriors in the New Guinea theater. Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger and Lieutenant General George C. Kenney were dynamic and gifted leaders that reported to MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific Theater in August 1942. Kenney assumed command of the U.S. Army (later to become the U.S. Fifth Air Force) and Allied Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific areas. Eichelberger was placed in command of I Corps; consisting of the 32nd and 41st Divisions. Kenney became a key member of MacArthur’s staff and immediately improved the fortunes of the Air Corps in the skies over New Guinea. Eichelberger remained on the Australian mainland and trained ground forces for the ensuing jungle warfare. Their paths did not cross again until 30 November 1942 when Eichelberger was summoned to MacArthur’s headquarters in Port Moresby.

The mood during that period was gloomy. The Allied offensive at Buna was not going well. American troops were not performing up to the high standards expected of them. The combined forces of the United States and Australia were not working in unison. One has to understand the mindset of MacArthur and his staff in order to gain a full appreciation of the criticality of the Papuan Campaign and specifically the Battle for Buna. In late 1942, the reputation of Douglas MacArthur was based on two military actions: the loss of the Philippines and MacArthur’s first campaign of the war, the stalled offensive at Buna.³

² Lida Mayo, Bloody Buna (New York: Doubleday 1974), 10.

³ John F. Shortal, Forged by Fire (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press 1987), x.

In Buna an untrained and ill-equipped 32nd Division went up against Japanese regulars; many of them veterans from the successes of the Malaysian Campaigns. MacArthur's options of dislodging the Japanese were extremely limited. New Guinea, the world's second largest island, was at the bitter end of the U.S. logistical lifeline.⁴ The U.S. Navy was of no help in the Papuan Campaign, as they were committed in Guadalcanal. Halsey's forces were close to winning that emotional struggle. Moreover, the poorly charted waters and dangerous coral reefs of New Guinea discouraged naval planners. The Europe first policy meant that MacArthur, one of the most flamboyant and controversial figures in U.S. military history, was denied amphibious landing craft, artillery and tanks.⁵ MacArthur was convinced that the Battle for Buna could be won. Kenney was transforming his air forces into a formidable strategic component and was engaging the enemy over the Papuan peninsula. However, the current ground commanders; specifically General Harding and his 32nd Division, were bogged down at Buna. MacArthur concluded that leadership was at fault. He decided that the right leader could overcome the shortcomings on the ground and salvage a victory.⁶ Douglas MacArthur gave Eichelberger, his most aggressive field commander the famous verbal order: "Bob, take Buna or don't come back alive."⁷

Buna: The Immature Theater

The basics of land warfare were no secrets to the major Allied and Axis powers at the start of World War II. Military observers from all countries took in the lessons of war from the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, the Japanese invasions of China and Malaya,

⁴ Ibid., x.

⁵ Mayo, 75.

⁶ Shortal, x.

⁷ William Manchester, American Caesar (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1978), 375.

the German Blitzkrieg, the Mideast desert wars, and even our engagement with the Japanese on the Bataan peninsula. None of these experiences prepared any military force for the realities of major land combat in the South Pacific.

Combat in the South Pacific was harsh, crude and primitive. Neither Japan, Australia nor the U.S. possessed the knowledge or equipment required to overcome the challenges raised by the brutal terrain. At the immediate shoreline the land was beautiful, lush and green. A few hundred yards inland the terrain turned into bogs and dense jungle. Vegetation prohibited one from seeing even a few feet ahead. The ground was swampy, wet, and humid with few trails to support any logistical or ground movement. The Owen Stanley Mountains, which divided the Papuan peninsula, reached heights of up to 13,000 feet in wet, chilly and dense overgrowths. The trails across the Owen Stanley were sparse, but men and material somehow needed to traverse these one-man-wide narrow paths.

Operational factors, primarily the “physical characteristics of the space” are vital to preparing military operations. It is the responsibility of the military commander to understand geography and terrain. The savage physical environment of Buna shaped the battlefield. Ground forces were forced to operate in a miserable environment. If correctly used, the jungle could be your ally or just as quickly be your worst enemy. The terrain prevented forces from using the newest warfare technology, instead the struggle for Buna became a primitive “one on one” fight conducted at close range. Regardless of the combat preparation, both sides discovered there was practically no area in the world that simulated the conditions encountered at New Guinea. To put it simply, logistics, communications, airfields and infrastructure did not exist in this corner of the globe.⁸

⁸ Eric M. Bergerud, Touched with Fire (New York: Viking 1996), 54.

Troops suffered from the environment as much as they suffered from their opponents. Malaria and dengue fever were prevalent. Depression and a lackadaisical attitude often set in. On average, two weeks after U.S. forces landed on New Guinea the rate of sickness began to climb and at all times thereafter a heavy percentage of every combat unit was hospitalized by malaria and other fevers. For every two men who were battlefield casualties, five were out of action from the fever. Jungle, swamp, stifling climate, insects and fever plus the Japanese combined to make the men at the Buna front the most wretched-looking soldiers ever to wear the American uniform.⁹

The Japanese at Buna were entrenched in superb defensive positions awaiting the Allied attack. On one side the enemy was protected by the sea and on the other side the nearly impenetrable swamps. The middle area was guarded by the wide stretch of continuous swamp between two creeks. U.S. attacks were confined to the trails, which were channeled along two widely separated corridors without any communication between the two creeks. Japanese troops also included veteran engineering units. These units were initially brought in at the start of the campaign to construct roads on the Kokoda Trail, however they shifted their mission to building defensive positions around Buna.¹⁰

U.S. troops approaching Buna were ignorant of the defenses that faced them. They found enemy forces established in almost impregnable defensive works, which baffled early attackers and left them uncertain of the exact location of foes. The defense in depth consisted essentially of a network of mutually supported bunkers. The 32nd Division was the first to take on and later (with Eichelberger's leadership), to conquer

⁹ Papuan Campaign, (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1990), 12.
¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

Japanese strongholds. Because of the high water tables, dugouts at Buna were not feasible. Above ground bunkers were constructed with coconut logs, reinforced with oil drums and ammunition boxes filled with sand. Each bunker was camouflaged with the fast growing vegetation. Added to the defenses were snipers who would alert the bunkers to oncoming attackers. Additional camouflaged fortifications outside the bunkers housed machine gun nests. Bunkers were used as protection against air attacks or artillery. U.S. ground forces had to take out these bunkers by stumbling upon them and outflanking them again and again until the defenders were worn out. The cost of taking the bunkers were extremely high. U.S. Army field commanders concluded that Japanese forces at Buna were fighting strictly a defensive battle.¹¹

MacArthur's Staff: The Failure of Operational Art

Douglas MacArthur faced three obstacles: his overrated staff, untrained troops, and poor relations with the Australians. His staff known as the "Bataan Gang" consisted of senior officers from Corregidor. This group of senior officers had a special bond and loyalty to the boss. Unfortunately for MacArthur, they lacked the vision for this new war.¹²

MacArthur's staff had difficulty understanding battlefield awareness. They could not visualize the battlefield in a tactical sense. Despite visits to the front from his staff officers, MacArthur's ignorance of the terrain in New Guinea cost many lives. At this stage of the war, a World War I mentality still dominated the conventional wisdom. Throwing masses of humanity against static, linear fronts was not conducive to success in

¹¹ Ibid., 13-16.

¹² Shortal, 43.

jungle warfare.¹³ The demands to take Buna at all costs and to drive through the objectives regardless of the losses would be unacceptable in today's world.

Partnership, mutual respect and coordination between MacArthur and the Australians was tense. The snickering started early and was rooted in the Australian's poor performance against the Japanese in Malaya. The Australian veterans of the Africa Campaign had little use for the inexperienced Americans. MacArthur did not control this hostility and it resulted in a breakdown of unity of effort. The comparisons went further: the British and Australians on Malaya held out for six weeks as compared to U.S. forces holding off the Japanese for five months on Bataan and Corregidor.¹⁴

The inflexibility of both Allied commands prevented Harding's 32nd Division from receiving badly needed tanks and artillery to take on Japanese bunkers. In compensation, Kenney, extremely loyal to MacArthur and to air warfare, said: "the artillery in this theater (Buna) flies." MacArthur supported this position and prior to and after Eichelberger's arrival at Buna.¹⁵

On a tactical intelligence standpoint, MacArthur's intelligence officer wrongly estimated that the Buna garrison consisted of 1,500 Japanese troops. In reality the Japanese survivors of the ill-fated and failed offensive over the Owen Stanley Mountains totaled over 8,000 troops in the area, including 2,500 fresh, well trained veterans from Malaya and China.¹⁶

Despite MacArthur's faults, his strategic brilliance and boldness outweighed his inaccurate assessments at Buna. The original Japanese offensive to capture Port Moresby

¹³ Mayo, 182-183.

¹⁴ Shortal, 35.

¹⁵ Mayo, 93.

¹⁶ Shortal, 41.

failed because of the terrain. The Japanese high command ordered a withdrawal from the Owen Stanley Mountains to Buna for two reasons: Guadalcanal was not going well for the Imperial Navy and Japanese intelligence thought MacArthur was preparing for an amphibious assault on Buna. Understanding the strategic implications of this sudden withdrawal, MacArthur mounted an offensive with ill-trained American troops. MacArthur displayed boldness and risktaking in seizing this opportunity. Unfortunately, the American forces could not maintain the initiative and hence Eichelberger was called to the scene.¹⁷

Kenney: Developing the Theater

While Kenney was enroute to Australia (to take over as commander of the Army Air Forces of the Southwest Pacific), he heard the Japanese had made a landing on the north coast of New Guinea at a place called Buna and had started driving the Australians back along the trail over the Owen Stanley Mountains toward Port Moresby. According to a communiqué from MacArthur, the landing was opposed by U.S. aircraft, but the results did not hinder the Japanese invasion.¹⁸ Kenney knew that when he reported to Brisbane the first thing he had to do was to win over MacArthur. Like the other U.S. forces in that theater, the Air Corps was plagued with staying too far in the rear to be an effective deterrent. According to MacArthur's staff: their mission lacked direction, maintenance and training was poor, pilots did not know much about flying and couldn't put bombs on target, supplies were mismanaged, and primarily from the senior leaders on down it appeared that the troops did not have much stomach for fighting¹⁹

¹⁷ Mayo, 63-64.

¹⁸ George C. Kenney, General Kenney Reports (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce 1949; reprinted ed. Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, Washington, DC 1987), 19-20.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

Kenney won over MacArthur immediately by saying that if he (MacArthur) had enough confidence in Kenney to let him run his air show, then Kenney intended to do that very thing. He also told MacArthur that he knew how to run an air force better than anyone else and that there were many things wrong with his (MacArthur's) show. In pledging his loyalty to MacArthur, Kenney won his boss over and in the following months converted MacArthur from being indifferent to air power to being one of its strongest proponents.²⁰

Kenney's mastery of operational art was simple, he needed to achieve air superiority over the skies of New Guinea. To do this he had to do what his predecessor had not done and that was to *get his planes in the sky*. An operational commander must think not only on a tactical-strategic level, but also on a theater-strategic level. Japan was successful at Buna because they controlled the air. The Japanese bastion at Rabuul served as the key staging and supply center for their ambitious plan of encircling and dominating the Coral Sea. Capturing and controlling the Solomon Islands and New Guinea would do two things for the Japanese: it would set up an invasion of Australia and it would interrupt the logistics line from the United States to Australia. The essence of what Kenney understood was to get the planes in the sky and to shape and prepare the "battlefield" to the Allies advantage. In Doctor Vego's writings on operational functions, he states: "the situation that existed in the South Pacific Area in 1942 serves as an example of what can happen when the theater of operations is "immature" and cannot support deployed forces."²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Milan Vego, "Operational Functions" (Newport, RI: Naval War College, August 1996), 1.

Kenney's plan to MacArthur was to carry out one primary mission. That mission was to "take out the Japanese air strength until we owned the air over New Guinea... there was no use talking about playing across the street (in this case Rabuul) until we got the enemy off our front lawn."²² Achieving air superiority meant that the Allies would gain the mobility difference against the Japanese. In gaining this advantage, friendly forces would be protected and Japanese forces could be interdicted and degraded.²³ The operational commander therefore must provide the operational protection for his forces to fight another day, whether that be air or ground forces and he must provide the advantage of operational fires over an enemy.

Kenney, like his Japanese counterparts, understood the premium of airfields. On the Papuan peninsula, overland transportation across the Owen Stanley Mountains was nearly impossible and airfields were precious commodities. Buna had areas to build airfields, but these airfields had to be defended like fortresses.²⁴ The struggle over Henderson Field on Guadalcanal highlighted this reality. Kenney's initial analysis of his primary objective, was that he had to control the skies over New Guinea so that the Fifth Air Force could deny the Japanese logistics at Buna and at the same time protect and resupply U.S. ground forces. When all these tasks were accomplished and the logistical lifelines were secure, MacArthur's campaign doctrine consisting of: "...the movement forward of air power by successive bounds in order to gain local air superiority, provide adequate air cover for the advance of surface elements, and isolate each successive enemy position prior to the final assault by all arms..." could finally happen.²⁵

²² Kenney, 44.

²³ Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, IV-7.

²⁴ Timothy D. Gann, Fifth Air Force Light and Medium Bomber Operations during 1942 and 1943 (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, November 1993), 1.

²⁵ Ibid., 1.

It is not enough for an operational commander to have his sights set on the strategic picture, but when placed into a bad situation, a leader needs to look down to the lowest levels in the chain of command to identify a problem. Kenney's experiences as an operational commander was formed during World War I and the period between the wars. He was a master strategist and an aviation technical expert that recognized the revolution in military affairs. He was responsible for installing machine guns to the wings of planes and invented the parachute bomb which allowed low altitude, accurate bombing. Two assignments, prior to the war, that polished his skills in the strategy of air power were: chief of the Production Engineering Section at the Air Corps Material Division and assistant air attaché in Paris during the Luftwaffe's remarkable Blitzkrieg success. In the Material Division he mastered the art of logistics and as attaché he witnessed tactics and recommended improvements in U.S. aircraft. He was "...convinced that the U.S. Army Air Corps was markedly inferior to the major European air forces in quantity and quality of planes and personnel..." and brought this message back to senior leadership.²⁶ He said "You've got to devise stuff like that. I'd studied all the books... and Buna was not in any of them."²⁷

Kenney's deputy throughout the Southwest Pacific theater was Ennis Whitehead. Whitehead's previous assignment was in the Military Intelligence Division and he, like Kenney, gained a full appreciation of the Blitzkrieg and use of air power in the Battle of Britain. Both men saw air power not only in the strategic bombing and tactical fighting sense, but in mine laying, troop carrying and battlefield interdiction. An Air Corps

²⁶ Gann, 6.

²⁷ Kenney, xiv.

pioneer, Whitehead led a formation of fighters under the supervision of Billy Mitchell on bombing tests of warships.²⁸

Air superiority isolated the battlefield and destroyed the enemy's logistical center of gravity. Japanese naval vessels could no longer supply the ground forces on Buna. Japanese fighter aircraft flying long distances from Rabuul were unable to protect naval units that were resupplying Buna. The airfield at Buna became another center of gravity in which the Air Corps provided an advanced base and logistical air bridge over New Guinea. In terms of the operational level of war, the strategic level was linked to the tactical levels.²⁹ Greater firepower of U.S. aircraft, together with greater flying time over the Buna area of responsibility resulted in a shift of power in the Southwest Pacific. U.S. bombers could both resupply friendly troops and conduct bombing missions on Rabuul. The strategic goal was to hold the airfields for the next objective.

Kenney's actions influenced ground forces by expanding the use of his air forces. Due to the dense jungles, bombing Japanese targets was highly improbable and was a waste of precious ordnance. Their mission then shifted to supply and support. Buna became the first battle in World War II to be resupplied through the air. Men, artillery (105mm howitzers) and hospital support came over the Owen Stanley Mountains. Through operational protection, the Papuan peninsula developed into a mature theater by denying control of the skies to Japanese air forces.³⁰

Eichelberger: Leadership on the Ground

²⁸ Gann, 6.

²⁹ "Field Manual FM 1 Warfighting (Newport, RI: Naval War College, March 1989), 23.

³⁰ Samuel Milner, Victory in Papua. (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army 1957), 246.

Robert Eichelberger was known as a man who could get things done. In over 36 years in the Army, he developed the reputation of being an excellent leader, manager, trainer, tactician and warrior. Clichés are sometimes overused, but in Eichelberger's case they were never more true, he showed a genuine concern for his men and earned their respect because he was willing to share in their danger and discomfort.³¹

Eichelberger's grasp of the situation at Buna is operational art in micro form. His tasking was simple, clear and "melodramatic MacArthurian" - "take Buna or don't come back alive." The process he employed was not difficult and like Kenney he thought in fundamental terms. Kenney had to shake his people up and get them off their heels - he had to get the planes in the skies. Eichelberger had to do the same - get the ground forces out of the siege mentality and *get them back on the offensive*. His fundamentals were simple - leadership by example. Senior leadership had to get to the front, right up to the action and see the exact situation, reassess the tactics and go on the attack.

Eichelberger knew that Harding's 32nd Division was in a quagmire. Untrained and up against an experienced opponent, the men of the 32nd were lacking direction. The 32nd suffered because leadership stayed to the rear, the officers at the point of attack did not relay the exact situation to their superiors and new tactics were not employed in lieu of the unsuccessful attacks on Japanese positions. Furthermore, the care and feeding of the soldiers was dismal. Many of them did not have decent meals for days, medical attention was in demand and the basic chain of command structure had broken down. Subordinates were not addressing seniors properly and not much was being done to remedy this. Similar to MacArthur's woes, the ground commanders had a poor working relationship with their Allied counterpart. For MacArthur, the word that was reaching

³¹ Shortal, 30.

him was that U.S. forces were in disarray, had a defeatist attitude and were abandoning their weapons.³²

Within 48 hours of receiving the verbal tasking, Eichelberger was on the ground at Buna and on the front line only yards away from Japanese lines analyzing the battlefield, his troops and leaders. As directed by MacArthur, his first task was to relieve the current field commander, General Harding. Eichelberger gave Harding and his staff the benefit of the doubt for less than two days. On his second day at the front, it was painfully clear that unit cohesion and command and control were in turmoil. Harding was relieved and Eichelberger installed his staff and searched the front for leaders.³³ Eichelberger's initial actions at Buna dealt with the dynamics of combat: leaders are soldiers first, they must understand what their subordinates are going through and inspire the will to win.³⁴ Leaders must build trust and teamwork. These men were suffering the psychological impact from the harsh environment which effected their minds more than their bodies. Physiologically they were not properly treated, and lacked meals and medical care to effectively conduct combat operations.³⁵ Eichelberger's leadership was simple; yet phenomenal. He took care of the troops and instilled drive and organization into a demoralized outfit.

Not to trivialize what Eichelberger accomplished, but his second act after relieving the leadership was to re-establish unity of command and meet with as many officers as possible. His message was relayed throughout his forces: Don't expect someone to come in here to do the job, you will have to take Buna. He rotated forces off

³² Mayo, 106-109.

³³ Chwialkowski, 59-60.

³⁴ "Field Manual 100-5 Operations (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 1993), 2-11.

³⁵ "FM-100-5", 14-2.

the frontlines and ensured that men had hot meals. Most important, he found out that supplies were being flown in daily but, because of poor supply support leadership, food and needed supplies were not getting to the front.³⁶ Eichelberger was a personalized leader that could be compassionate and tougher than the toughest commanders; he did not hesitate to replace personnel if they were not doing the job. Unlike those before him, he was in touch and always surveying the front.³⁷

George Marshall knew Eichelberger's skills and was certain he was the right man to compliment MacArthur. Eichelberger's tact and diplomacy fostered cooperation with the Allies and through this he was able to finally get the Australians to provide him with tanks. Eichelberger's first attack against the Japanese emplacements (without tanks) was reminiscent of the World War I tactics. His forces gained some land, but at a great cost. MacArthur's misunderstanding of the situation still existed when he sent communiqüs to Eichelberger tell him that time is of the essence and that he should attack with more forces.³⁸

On the micro level of Buna, Eichelberger dismissed mass attack tactics and developed the battlefield into a "squad war." He had the courage in his convictions, when MacArthur was pressing for attacks, to retrain his forces in night operations and small squad tactics designed to probe for enemy positions. For the first time at Buna, U.S. forces kept constant pressure on the enemy. Squad tactics located enemy strongholds and Allied tanks (only a dozen), in combination with Australian infantry, finally broke Japanese defenses.³⁹

³⁶ Shortal, 52.

³⁷ Ibid., 53.

³⁸ Chwialkowski, 61-63.

³⁹ Shortal, 55.

Eichelberger, like Kenney, did not get caught in the trappings of the previous wars. His job was one of the most difficult given to an American commander. He had to motivate an untrained and demoralized force in an environment where few armies fought. Moreover, he had to accomplish this with superiors who were impatient, ignorant, and unwilling to recognize the elements of the battlefield. Kenney had a tremendous advantage over Eichelberger; no one knew air power more than Kenney, he was the ultimate air expert. When successful in-theater air operations happened, Kenney got the recognition. Eichelberger, an infantryman at heart, always had other “so called experts” looking over his shoulders and had to deal with the ultimate soldier - MacArthur.

Conclusion

The Battle for Buna was a prelude to how MacArthur’s forces operated in the Pacific throughout the remainder of World War II. The numbers involved in the battle are small compared to the number of troops involved in Europe in both world wars. In this case the theater did not support grand armies and commanders needed to employ different tactics to achieve objectives. MacArthur learned the lessons of Buna and the economy of force. A convert to air power and the cessation of needless bloodletting on battlefields, MacArthur never operated his ground forces without air cover again and continually bypassed Japanese strongholds in order to preserve lives. His motto became, “No more Buna’s.”⁴⁰

Kenney and Eichelberger grasped the concepts of operational functions. They developed the theater and were true heroes who added to the legend of MacArthur. It was their tactics that were translated to the theater-strategic level that defeated Japan. A testimony to their leadership and innovativeness is in today’s war colleges. Kenney’s

⁴⁰ Mayo, 188.

exploits were incorporated into U.S. Air Force studies. Credit due to Eichelberger was outshined by the bright luminescence of MacArthur. In a small way, he finally got the upper hand on MacArthur when Eichelberger's leadership techniques on the battlefield of Buna were added to the curriculum at the Army War College in the 1980s.⁴¹

⁴¹ Shortal, 42.

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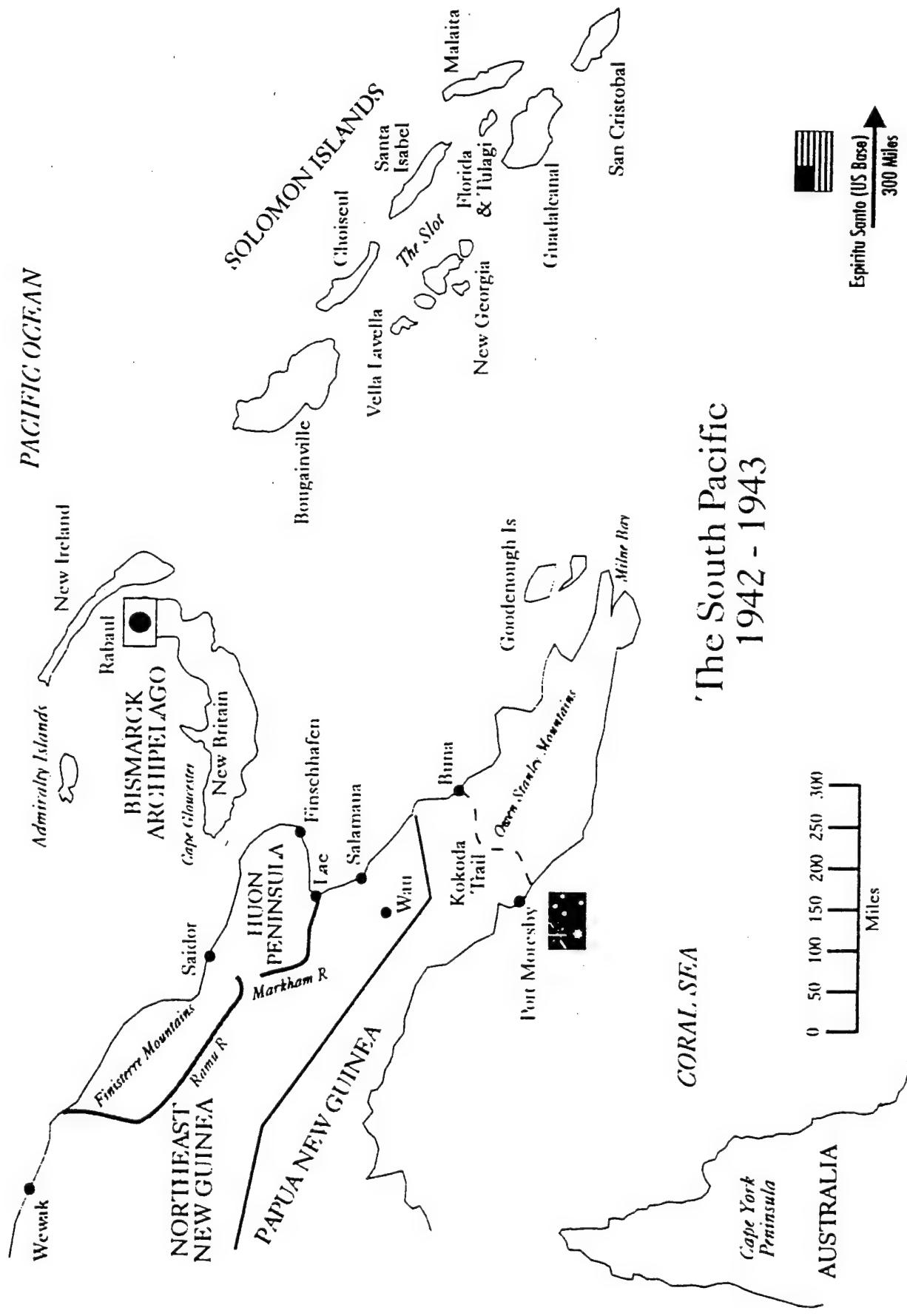
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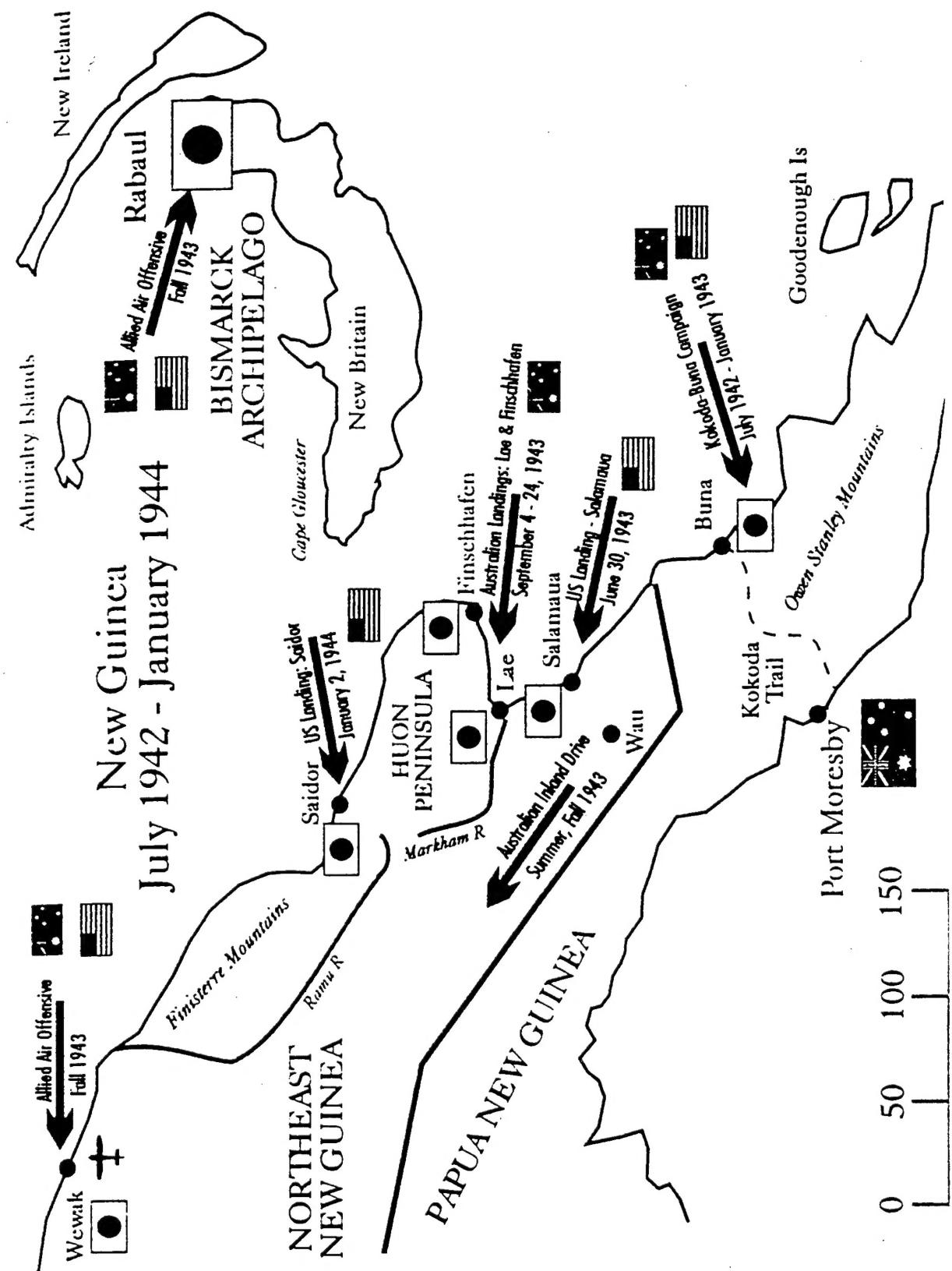
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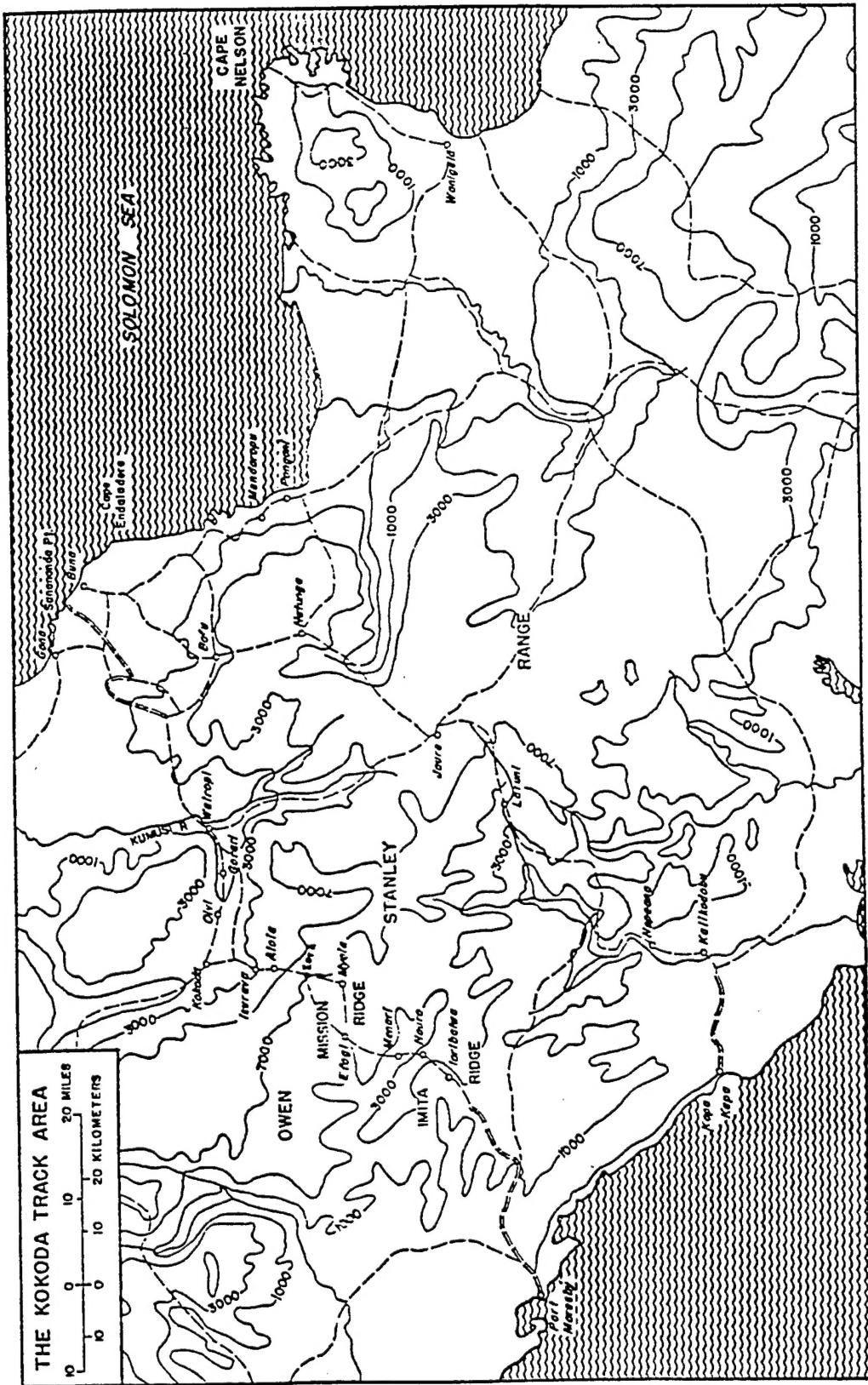
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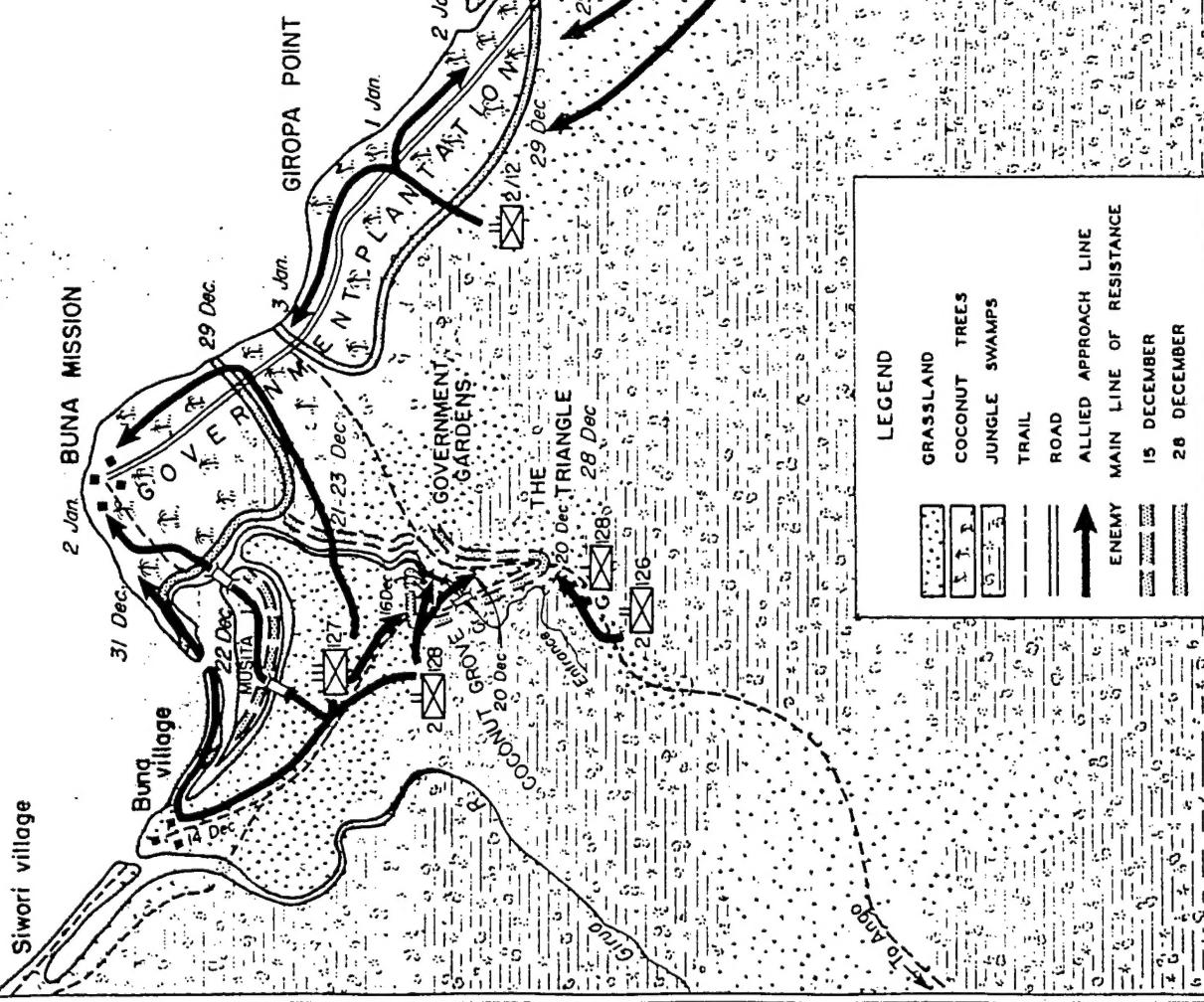






THE CAPTURE OF BUNA

15 DECEMBER 1942 - 3 JANUARY 1943

SCALE
0 500 yards

Allied Siege of Buna Gona Fortified Zone
November 18, 1942-January 23, 1943

